

10th June 2022

Forever

**“Never here, forever there,
Where all parting, pain and care,
And death, and time shall disappear –
Forever there, but never here.”**

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Old Clock on the Stairs*

On 26th and 29th May, I touched on my lack of understanding of the Ascension, and how I'm content "not to know". However, I've been giving it some further thought, and pondering what it means to have our Lord "gone into heaven" and yet still be with us. Interesting process ...

So, here's where I begin. Jesus has gone forever. That's what the Gospels tell us. That's what the Ascension means. Gone! Job done! Back home! "Never here", as Longfellow puts it. "Offski!" as Billy Connolly defines it. Now "gone" could mean abandonment, leaving folk to their own devices, no longer around to be influential. That's often how people express their feelings of grief following the death of a significant person in their lives. A widow said to me after the death of her husband, "He's gone, abandoned me, and taken all the good stuff with him." Following the death of my father, twenty years after my mother died, I remember feeling "orphaned", lost, as if I was a child in a big department store, out of sight of both my parents. I was scared and alone. "Forever there" – wherever "there" is – "but never here", where I needed them to be.

But in a paradoxical way (and is faith not full of paradoxes?) this "gone" business isn't about abandonment at all. The Bible assures us that we have "the gift of the Spirit" at Pentecost. OK! I get that. But it's more than that for me. It's about the spirit of Jesus being "forever there" *and* "forever here" – both at the same time.

One of the current grief theories talks about "continuing bonds", and how, in loss, we are bound to the person who has died, but in different ways. A wonderful book to help children with loss is *The Invisible String*, by Patrice Karst. These metaphors of loss say the same thing to me about Ascension and Pentecost. Our Lord *can* be both "there" and "here" at the same time – forever! I still don't understand it all – and I can't explain it too well either! But I know what I know, and I trust that will be forever too.

A prayer for today

Here, there, everywhere? Strange, but that's how it feels. OK? Amen